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TAGS: [ELAB](#) [ECON](#) [PGOV](#) [IV](#)

SUBJECT: TEACHERS, PROFESSORS, MEDICAL WORKERS END STRIKES;  
GOV'T EXPRESSES EXASPERATION, ISSUES WARNING DURING  
NATIONAL "SOCIAL CONVENTION"

REF: ABIDJAN 203

[1](#)1. (U) Summary. Within the last few weeks, striking secondary school teachers (reftel), university professors and researchers, and medical technicians and nurses all ended their strikes, bringing a measure of labor calm to the government-controlled zone (the strikes did not take place in the Forces Nouvelles-held zones). End Summary.

[1](#)2. (SBU) Secondary schools resumed classes on March 19 after twenty six school days were lost. The Ministry of Education (controlled by FPI stalwart Michel Amani N'Guessan) yielded significant ground, committing to implement recommendations made at a 2006 Grand Bassam seminar to increase housing allowances and boost the grade of teachers with advanced degrees. More importantly, the Ministry agreed to recognize the "illegal" union behind the strike that was more than 90 percent effective in the government zone. In an abrupt, politically embarrassing volte face, the Ministry agreed to let the Coordination of Secondary School Teachers (CES) apply for legal status. In an attempt to break the strike, five CES leaders had been jailed (for declaring a strike by an "illegal" group), but the government was later forced to released them, bowing to public pressure to end the strike as teachers remained firm in their demands.

[1](#)3. (SBU) University professors and researchers ended their two-week old strike on March 14 when President Gbagbo offered to "consider" their demands for higher professional grades and the reinstatement of doctors and nurses at teaching hospitals into the national Civil Service.

[1](#)4. (SBU) On March 12, the nation's paramedical corps ended their eleven-day strike after the government issued a decree implementing a January accord to boost allowances by 100 percent. The government had failed to put into effect the January accord, prompting a resumption of the paramedics' work stoppage from January.

[1](#)5. (SBU) The end of the work stoppages took place shortly after the conclusion of a week-long "Social Forum" in Grand Bassam on March 2. At the closing ceremony, President Gbagbo announced some modest changes in labor practices: the end of mandatory retirement after 30 years of service, an increase in family and transport allowances, consideration of more sweeping recommendations put forth by public and private commissions related to public salary levels (frozen since 1997), an overall revision of the public sector professional grading system, and increased protections for private sector employees against dismissal and layoffs. However, the President asked participants to sign a "social truce" against strikes on April 3, reinforcing not-so veiled threats of stronger actions against strikers made by Labor Minister Hubert Oulaye (also FPI) during the Forum.

¶6. (SBU) Comment: The government appears to have bought some labor peace, at least in the short term, by acceding to much of the unions' agenda. However, the relative success of these strikes may encourage similar actions by other groups, at least in the public sector. We would not be surprised to see such labor challenges arise early in the existence of a new transitional government, whether it be led by Soro or someone else. End Comment.  
Hooks